

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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R 181930Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1409

INFO AMCONSUL RECIFE

AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 444

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BR

SUBJ: MDB SPLIT INTENSIFIES

REF: BRASILIA 386

SUMMARY: THE CLOSING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SAW THE MDB, NEVER COHESIVE, FURTHER DEBILITATED BY OPEN AND OCCASIONALLY RANCOROUS DISAGREEMENT REGARDING THE AUTENTICOS' DETERMINATION TO SUBMIT BLANK VOTES RATHER THAN (IN THEIR TERMS) "CONDONE THE ELECTORAL FARCE" BY VOTING FOR GUIMARAES. WHILE VARIOUS SANCTIONS PUNISHING THE AUTENTICOS' DEFIANCE HAVE BEEN WIDELY RUMORED, NO ACTIONS HAVE YET BEEN DETERMINED UPON, AND IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER SOME MODERADOS' THIRST FOR VENGEANCE WILL OVERCOME WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE BROADER DESIRE WITHIN THE PARTY TO AVOID ACTIONS THAT COULD FURTHER WEAKEN IT. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RETROSPECT, IT APPEARS THE MDB NEVER OVERCAME THE INTERNAL DIVISIONS REFLECTED IN THE THREE ALTERNATIVES FIRST RAISED (BY ONE GROUP OR ANOTHER WITHIN THE PARTY) IN THE WAKE OF GEISEL'S DESIGNATION LAST JUNE : (1) SUPPORT
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GEISEL; (2) NOMINATE PARTY PRESIDENT ULISSES GUIMARAES;

(3) NOMINATE DOM HELDER CAMARA. THE PARTY'S SUBSEQUENT DECISION, MANIFESTED IN MAJORITY VOTES IN TWO CONVENTIONS, TO RUN GUIMARAES, OVERRULED THE AUTENTICOS BUT DID NOT OVERCOME THEIR OBJECTIONS.

2. ARGUING LATER IN DEFENSE OF THEIR DETERMINATION NOT TO "CONDONE THE ELECTORAL FARCE" BY ACTUALLY CASTING VOTES FOR GUIMARAES, AUTENTICOS ASSERTED THAT IT HAD NEVER BEEN INTENDED THAT GUIMARAES RUN AS A REAL CANDIDATE (THUS THE TERM "ANTI-CANDIDATE), GIVEN THE WELL-ESTABLISHED IMPOSSIBILITY OF HIS WINNING; RATHER, THEY CLAIMED, THE ONLY PURPOSE WAS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED BY THE ELECTORAL "CAMPAIGN" TO CARRY THEIR MESSAGE TO AND STRENGTHEN THEIR TIES WITH THE PEOPLE.

3. REACTING, IN SOME CASES ANGRILY, MODERADOS POINTED OUT THAT THE MAJORITY WILL OF THE PARTY HAD BEEN DETERMINED DEMOCRATICALLY BY VOTE, AND IT WAS SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE THAT THAT WILL SHOULD BE FLAUNTED BY WHAT ONE MODERADO CALLED A "TINY MINORITY" (ACTUALLY, OF COURSE, AUTENTICOS NUMBERED WELL OVER 25 PERCENT OF THE MDB MEMBERS OF CONGRESS). IN THIS THEY WERE JOINED BY FOUR AUTENTICOS, ONE OF WHOM (ALCEU COLLARES) POINTED OUT THAT FAILURE TO RESPECT THE CONVENTION VOTES REFLECTED BADLY ON THE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES (INCLUDING RULE OF THE MAJORITY), AND BY IMPLICATION ON ITS RIGHT TO GOVERN.

4. FURTHER ADDING TO THE MDB'S TROUBLES WAS THE CONTROVERSY WHICH DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE NATIONAL MDB LEADERSHIP AND THE REGIONAL GUANABARA PARTY CONTROLLED BY MDB GOVERNOR CHAGAS FREITAS, WHO FAILED TO GIVE ANY SUPPORT TO THE MDB PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAGIN, AND WHO, ALTHOUGH HE REPORTEDLY DENIED RESPONSIBILITY, WAS CRITICIZED FOR BLOCKING ONE ATTEMPT OF THE NATIONAL MDB LEADERSHIP TO HOLD A WIND-UP RALLY IN RIO. A SECOND ATTEMPT RAN AGROUND WHEN THE PRESIDENT OF THE REGIONAL PARTY DIRECTORATE BECAME SUDDENLY UNAVAILABLE (HE WAS VARIOUSLY REPORTED TO BE IN PORTO ALEGRE, IN BUENOS AIRES, OR HIDING IN HIS OFFICE BATHROOM). FEARING ANY RALLY IN RIO WOULD FLOP WITHOUT LOCAL PARTY SUPPORT, THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP SETTLED INSTEAD ON A LUNCHEON MEETING BETWEEN

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GUIMARAES (AND VP CANDIDATE BARBOSA LIMA SOBRINHO) AND JOURNALISTS. CONGEN RIO COMMENTS THAT "AFTER HIS MOST RECENT SABOTAGING OF THE MDB CAMPAIGN IN RIO, MORE CRIES HAVE COME FOR CHAGAS' EXPULSION. IN ITS WEAKENED CONDITION, HOWEVER, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE MDB CAN AFFORD TO LOSE THE ONLY GOVERNOR IT HAS."

5. SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS MAY DETERMINE THE RESOLUTION OF

THE CURRENT DEBATE OVER WHAT PUNISHMENT--IF ANY--SHOULD BE HANDLED THOSE AUTENTICOS WHO VOTED IN BLANK. LEGALLY, THEY COULD PROBABLY BE STRIPPED OF THEIR MANDATES, AND IT HAS BEEN RECENTLY SUGGESTED IN THE PRESS THAT ONE AMBITIOUS SUPLENTE OR ANOTHER MIGHT TRY TO BRING THAT ABOUT IN ORDER TO TAKE OVER A SEAT. EARLIER MUTTERING FROM WITHIN THE PARTY ON THIS POSSIBILITY HAS DIED DOWN, HOWEVER, WITH ATTENTION NOW CENTERING ON THE SOMEWHAT MILDER ACTION OF REMOVING THE OFFENDERS FROM THEIR PARTY AND CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE POSITIONS. EVEN THIS ACTION WOULD HAVE FURTHER RAMIFICATIONS, AS MDB CHAMBER LEADER ALDO FAGUNDES (AS WELL AS OTHERS) HAS PLACED HIMSELF IN OPPOSITION TO ANY PUNISHMENT OF THE AUTENTICOS. IN TURN, IT HAS NOW BEEN RUMORED THAT HE COULD BE REMOVED FROM THE LEADERSHIP WHEN CONGRESS RECONVENES IN MARCH.

6. COMMENT: THE MDB'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS CAN ONLY ADD TO ARENA'S SENSE OF TRIUMPH, ALREADY GREAT IN THE WAKE OF THE LOPSIDED ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTE. THE MDB, VARIOUSLY FRUSTRATED WITH AND CYNICAL ABOUT A SYSTEM WHICH GIVES IT A BUILT-IN IDENTITY CRISIS, MAY USE THE LONG RECESS (WHICH OF COURSE INCLUDES CARNIVAL) TO TRY TO PATCH UP, OR
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